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HESPER:
AN AMERICAN DRAMA.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE CONFESSIONS OF HERMES, AND OTHER POEMS.
By PAUL HERMES. *Bound in vellum cloth, gilt top, pp. 153.*
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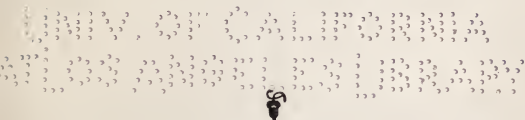
HESPER:

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BY

WILLIAM ROSCOE THAYER,

AUTHOR OF "THE CONFESSIONS OF HERMES, AND OTHER POEMS."



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TO PROFESSOR
CHARLES ELIOT NORTON,
I DEDICATE THIS SLIGHT TOKEN OF ADMIRATION,
GRATITUDE, AND FRIENDSHIP.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE following Drama is an excursion into a field which has been as yet but rarely trodden by American poets,—the field, that is, of experience almost contemporary. The Master of American fiction has told us how much more easily he moved among scenes long past, and the romantic haunts of Italy, than among the glaring, obtrusive realities of his own age and country. Time and distance doubtless shed a pleasing glamour around persons and events; familiarity too often breeds contempt: yet, certainly, the poet should discern and strive to express whatsoever is beautiful or heroic or tragic in the present. The moral qualities of our human nature, its emotions and passions, be they good or evil, vary little in substance from epoch to epoch, although the acts by which they are made manifest may differ as widely as fashions in garments differ. Incidents are inferior in importance to character. To find ourselves at conflict with our surroundings;

to cherish and pursue our ideals, despite outward obstacles and defeat, — there lie the real tragedy, the true heroism, of life. And few periods, it seems to me, have been richer than our own in these contrasts: for we live in an era when traditional creeds have ceased to satisfy many serious minds (and that surely implies a spiritual drama most awful and most intense); when armies of brave men have died on the field of battle, and as many more have led noble, disinterested lives, in behalf of an idea; and when we have come to apprehend — dimly, it is true — that we are members, not of a detached community or an isolated nation, but of humanity itself, and that this kinship lays upon us the responsibility of farther-reaching duties, and admonishes us to nobler endeavors. Should any reader of this Drama discover in it a faithful portrayal of the action of some of these mighty influences upon characters drawn from contemporary life, my purpose in publishing “Hesper” will be attained. But though I fail in this, I shall hold unshaken the belief that other men, richer in imagination and more skilful in expression, will turn to our nineteenth-century conditions for the elements of great and abiding poetry.

W. R. T.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.,

October 29, 1888.

*Out of my hands went slipping, slipping,
Threads of mystery, skein on skein, —
Threads entangled and diverse-tinted,
Gorgeous with joy or gloomy with pain ;
Some seemed clews of a hope immortal,
Some seemed fibres of hearts that grieve :
“ Human Passion hath spun these for thee,”
Whispered a spirit ; “ wind them, and weave.”*

CHARACTERS OF THE DRAMA.

RALPH HESPER	<i>A Northerner.</i>
BLACKMAR	<i>His Uncle.</i>
DARNEL	<i>Blackmar's Friend.</i>
EDWARD ROMAINÉ	<i>Brother of Constance.</i>
BLAKE	<i>A Lieutenant.</i>
CONSTANCE ROMAINÉ	<i>A Virginian.</i>
MRS. HESPER	<i>Ralph's Mother.</i>

Officers, a Surgeon, etc.

THE DRAMA OPENS ABOUT 1860, AND CLOSES DURING THE
WAR OF THE REBELLION.

HESPER.

Act First.

SCENE I.

HESPER (*alone*).

Ye mighty Dead, my masters and my friends,
Who urge my soul with purposes sublime,
And show me patterns ample for the gods,
Shall I blame you that in this actual world
I find not gods, but pygmies? Was I duped,
Believing your magnificent report,
To look for great companions like yourselves?
If you lived now to breathe this barren air,
Made murky by the sordid smoke of trade,
And staled by prayers of slowly withering creeds,
Would your hearts beat as bravely? Would your hopes
Remember still to soar? Would you still match
With equal deeds your fearless aspirations?

Alas! to wake upon a wearied world,
Where mortals plod the present listlessly,
And turn regretful glances towards the past!
Alas! insatiate yesterdays that stript
The fairest fruits and blossoms from the earth,
And left to-day a beggar! Egotists

Who throw your shadows 'twixt the sun and us,
And sing your pæans to a heartfelt joy
We crave but cannot feel, why, why torment
By praises of the rapture Beauty lit
In you, when Earth was young? Young? Can it be
Mankind's career is but a larger print
Of every several man? From infancy
To witless age, does Fate condemn our race
To unavailing and perpetual change?
Then Rome and Athens and Jerusalem
Were but as moods and registers of life,
Which played at conquests, arts, religions, States,
As school-boys at their games. These now are toys
That more amuse us not; and what we call,
In our delusion, progress, is but growth
From green to ripe, from ripe to sad decay.

In vain we walk the chilly Autumn through
To seek the budding promises of Spring,
Or Summer's lush fulfilment; landscape, air,
Th' infrequent birds, and something in our hearts,
Foretell that Winter's nearing with its shroud.
We are the children of Time's waning year,
And, thus begotten of a hoary race,
Are old in youth, while e'en the old, who lived
When Man exulted in his glorious spring,
Were younger than our young. But may not we
Content us with our season, like the flowers
That turn their faces latest to the sun,
Or like those brutish men whom satisfy
The scant and icy stipend of the North?

Ah, no!

October's gentian never dreamed of May,

Nor Esquimaux of Italy's delight,
Whilst us the vision of Lost Youth pursues,
The consciousness of Beauty unbeheld,
The pang of irrecoverable Joy!

My masters! I believe that you saw these
As large-eyed stars which spangle summer nights,
But which, receding through unfathomed dark,
Have sped beyond our ken. Ye deemed them fixed,
Eternal poles by which all men might steer;
But we have searched the heavens where you bid,
And see no glimmer of your lustrous guides, —
Darkness has palled them. Peradventure, now
They shine upon you in some world remote,
And ages hence, when they have lighted all
The denizens of all the orbs of heaven,
They will return on their celestial round,
And re-illumine Earth. Youth, then, and Hope,
Awaking, shall forget the hideous dreams
That frightened intervening sleep, and Earth
Shall be again the pleasant theatre
Whereon each mortal plays a manly part,
Cheered by the presence of approving gods,
And not this dungeon where poor slaves await
Their call to combat with Fate's monstrous beasts.

But must we, meanwhile, grope in darkness here?
Must we for comfort — if a soul-suspense
Can feel the steady touch of comfort — take
Those chronicles of light revealed to you,
And nurse the doubtful hope — more wish than hope —
That those benignant stars, your joyous guides,
May shine on us hereafter? Even now
One voice I heard above the time's turmoil,

That spake your language, clear and undefiled.
Him, like a pilgrim from the sands of Doubt,
I sought among his sturdy, tranquil pines.
His presence was a live benevolence,
His smile philosophy, his manners peace ;
And who beheld his eyes, serene and deep,
Must wonder if their radiance was shed
From inner fountains of exhaustless light,
Or if, whate'er he saw, he saw divine.
To him I was a child that weeping brings
Its troubles to its mother. Silently
He heard my woes ; but when I thought to hear
The one great word that should have set me free,
He answered : “ Not from others is thy help :
Rely upon thyself ; be good, and trust.”
Saddened I went, like one who homeward fared
From Delphi, with his former pack of doubts
Made heavier by th' ambiguous oracle.

My heart, my heart, how oft I question thee !
How oft thou whisperest this same behest :
“ Mark with what gorgeous curtains day conceals
The nothingness of night, that thou mayst weave
As fair a pattern of heroic deeds
Upon the black of Death ! ” Oh ! may I blow
A Roland blast, to flood this grim defile
Till echoes pour beyond it, and announce
To farthest and ignoble men that here
One lowliest of the Paladins has fallen,
But fallen unsubdued !

SCENE II. — *A Room.* BLACKMAR and MRS. HESPER.

BLACKMAR.

So Ralph still holds his supercilious mood,
And grandly dubs the world a dunghill! Lord,
It is prepost'rous how these youngsters rant!
Yet I'd not have them lessen by a hair
Their self-complacency, their proud contempt,
Their thousand schemes for bending crooked straight,
And gluing goose-quill wings on all our backs!
Dear, silly, generous boys! We should laugh less
If you got common-sense and beards together.
And, after all, there's no great harm — indeed,
I like the smack of talent — if this mood
Lasts not too long. But Ralph is now a man,
And should behave like men. Society
Has claims upon us all; it offers him
Advantages he were a fool to spurn.

MRS. HESPER.

I do not grieve because he shuns the world,
But that he seems unhappy. If his course
Brought him contentment, I should be content;
But since he suffers, it cannot be right,
And I beseech of your experience
A remedy. You men are more expert,
And wiser, — see what's best, though far ahead, —
Whereas our doting mothers' eyes are blurred
By near solicitude.

BLACKMAR.

True, sister, true :

Yet 't is not strange that mothers should be fond.

✓ You judge your children by your hopes ; we men

Judge each man by his merits, trade in cash, —

Not promises to pay, — and square accounts.

Your Ralph, you know, I've cherished as a son,

And though I sometimes feared his training were

A trifle tender, shielded from all knocks

That help to mould a man —

MRS. HESPER.

You would not bid

A mother step indifferently aside

Whilst troubles strike her child? Too soon, alas,

The blows must fall she cannot take for him !

BLACKMAR.

No, no, you acted right, as Nature led.

I might, perhaps, if I had had a son, .

Have tried the sterner method ; tossed him in

And watched him learn to swim ; encouraged him

To frolic with his fellows ; see the world,

And so learn how to use it for himself.

But Ralph's unspoiled : that proves his tissue sound,

And argues well for his success hereafter,

If we can cure him of perversity.

His father, you recall, had not outgrown

Vagaries when he died ; but he was shrewd,

And even when his fancies walked the clouds,

He firmly trod the earth. Send Ralph to me ;
I'll show him common-sense, and, once convinced,
We'll make a man of him.

MRS. HESPER.

He's manly now ;
I pray you make him happy. But take care
To treat him very gently. He is one
To coax, and not upbraid. His pride will rise
A tower against attack, but ope the gate
To welcome friendly comers.

BLACKMAR.

Trust to me.
I have, I think, some knowledge of the world —
Know when to smooth and when to rouse, — in fine,
The art of arts, the art of ruling men.

[*Exit* MRS. HESPER.]

O widows' darlings, ever at extremes !
Some take the bit in mouth and headlong drive,
With cards and wine and women, to the devil ;
Some ride their silly hobbies of conceit,
And think their wooden toy a Pegasus :
Headstrong and useless both. Ah, here he is.

[*Enter* RALPH.]

Well, nephew, what good news about yourself ?

HESPER.

I daily breathe my thousand quarts of air ;
I eat, and drink, and sleep, and sometimes — think.

BLACKMAR.

I thought you were above us common folk,
And had a lordlier habit, for we all
Do that.

HESPER.

Not all, by quail and terrapin !
I have seen some from thinking so averse,
They worked their gullets that their brains might rest.

BLACKMAR.

Still cynical ! The tune of callow youth
And dissipated age. Come, Ralph, 't is time
To take life as you find it.

HESPER.

So I do.

I find it heartless, vapid, and corrupt ;
Men are all Esaus, and I tell them so.
> Find me but one who has a high intent, —
Dares speak the truth whatever ears may hear,
Dares act regardless of the plea of self,
Through all obstructions sees his purpose clear, —
And he shall be my friend.

BLACKMAR.

Do you suppose
That I — or any man — am satisfied ?
That if we might create the world anew
We would not shape it closer to our tastes ?
Your dreamers prate as if they only saw

What's patent to us all. They scold and sigh,
And neither have their dreams, nor yet enjoy
The casual good around them. Where's their gain?
I make the most of life. If there is bad,
Well, I am not to blame. Do many suffer?
'T was by no wish of mine, and blameless I
Accept my dole of pleasure. Confess that I
Am more philosopher than most who wear
That name.

HESPER.

In truth you are! You dignify
A venerable school, at least as old
As that profound and most unselfish sage,
Semiramis. *Eat, drink, be merry; for*
To-morrow you shall die. Most wise, most wise!

BLACKMAR.

You sneer—

HESPER.

Nay, uncle, this is admiration.

BLACKMAR.

But sneers are sterile. Look the other way:
Suppose we reckon your advantages,
Ere we sum up your fancied wants. First, then,
Good family, position well assured—

HESPER.

What profits that in free America?

BLACKMAR.

Your father came of very well-bred stock,
The Blackmars date from —

HESPER.

Adam! Wonderful!

When shall we stop this talk of pedigrees?
Let German princelings sprung from feudal thieves,
Or British dukes from Stuarts' mistresses,
Brag of their ancestors, and shame themselves
Thereby. The long-kept secret's out at last, —
A chimpanzee was father of us all.

BLACKMAR.

I half believe it, for at every turn
I run on creatures on whose face is stamped,
Beyond dispute, their apish parentage.
Still, blood does count, no less in man than horse;
Were this not true, all progress at a stand,
Each generation must begin afresh.
You have this treasure, though you prize it not.
Next, wealth is yours —

HESPER.

Too much! If I were poor
I might forget myself, compelled to work,
If any trade were honest.

BLACKMAR.

That's your ail?
The cures are many. First, I will prescribe

The farmer's diet : Rise at break of day,
Sweat on till dusk, raise hay and corn and hens,
Tend crops and cattle, and at night snore loud,
Or dream your squashes took first premium
And all your calves were heifers. Brows <
Hardened and tanned by sunshine and by storm
Are never wrinkled by religious doubts.
I paint a pretty idyl for you, like
Your rhymesters' sketch. Hail ! nephew Corydon !
I'll buy your lettuces and early peas,
And you shall sometimes bring your oaten stop
And pipe for us, and sing a madrigal.

HESPER.

I will do that — when you shall wed Bo-peep.

BLACKMAR.

Well, if this shirt-sleeve drudging likes you not,
Choose a polite profession. Doctors thrive
Upon mankind's diseases. There's the law,
A necessary evil, sure to last
As long as folly. Honor clings to both,
Preferment too, and wealth. Admit that shams
Flourish in both : still, doctors do much good,
Relieving pain ; and are not barristers
True peacemakers ? Or, there's the ministry —

HESPER.

Pray, can you tell a church that's orthodox,
Unless you see the steeple ? I doubt it.

BLACKMAR.

Oh, for myself, I have my private views ;
I rent a pew, but seldom sit in it ;
But still I recognize the need of preaching.
The lower classes must be held in check
By these religious terrors ; Romish priests
Are but police in other uniforms.
Or say they cheer, by hopes of paradise,
Poor devils struggling with a cheerless lot, —
Would you begrudge them that? I never would.
And if the rich assert their privilege
Of seeming pious one day out of seven,
Why, let them have their million-dollar church,
Their operatic choir and pulpiteer,
And eat their Sunday roast, full confident
That God and they are greater for their pomp.
Who knows but that a few get good from it?
If only one, I call it still a gain.

HESPER.

Your tolerance is most commendable ;
But 't would have kept all martyrs from their crown.

BLACKMAR.

Or you might teach : what worthier employ
Than to decant old knowledge in young minds?

HESPER.

Our knowledge is our sorrow.

BLACKMAR.

That depends
Upon its quality. Our schools should teach
The practical, which helps in earning bread,
Not fill young heads with speculative froth
And idle poets' whims. I half suspect
That even you, despite your common-sense,
Have been beguiled by so capricious stuff.
I've seen a mountebank's apprentice try
To dance upon a floor bestrewn with eggs ;
And so our versifiers pick their way,
Odd and ungainly, just as if they found
No inch to tread unheld by others' thoughts ;
Or else they boldly poach on old preserves,
And cook you such a salmi of conceits,
And rondeaux, catches, ballades, villanelles,
In their thin sauce, you're glad to dine off prose.

HESPER.

You criticise so pat these modern wits
One might assume you read them.

BLACKMAR.

Ralph, a man,
To pass as cultured, skims in many pans,
And knows the cream from curds ; it's a disgrace
When those who rank as learned hem and haw,
Like dolts, with no opinion to express.
But poems, pictures, and philosophies
Resemble ornaments that women wear :
Mere luxuries if you have time and means

To fritter on them, but superfluous
Till then, and even then but transient toys.
I've only met one poet on the street,
And he was there to borrow. Do not take
Their myths and fairy tales in earnest. Bah!
We have an English sportsman at the club,
Who has explored all Greece, climbed Helicon,
Olympus, and the rest, — a sharp-eyed man,
And yet he saw nor god nor demigod,
Nor dancing faun, nor covert dryades,
Only dull peasants in their fleece capotes,
And very little game.

HESPER.

Indeed? I've heard
The Muses are a bashful brood, and fly
At sight of gun.

BLACKMAR.

Let the old fables lie :
The dead past had its day ; we now have ours.
In this new country we require new views.
This is the golden age of progress ! Now
Inventions, factories, and industries
Bring comforts and prosperity to all.

HESPER.

Shades of dead gods and flint-hewn fetishes,
Behold our new idolatry !
We make our lifeless, ponderous machines,
Oil their steel joints, blow in a breath of steam,
And worship our creation ! Fools ! Bow down

In adoration of the human hand
Of which these are the proxies. Class me still
Apollo's devotee. Our trains are swift;
But does not Shakespeare, does not Washington,
Doomed to the jolting slowness of a coach,
Still travel foremost through posterity?

BLACKMAR.

Forever Washington! Your frigid George,
If truth be told, was but like other men,
Not erring less than we, but more discreet.
I've heard stray whispers of his quiet sport;
And as a captain, he secured the wreath
Deserved in part by many. Life is short,
Our recollection careless; therefore we
Roughly denote a thousand facts by one,
And one man looms as symbol for an age.
But, thanks to common-sense, I'm critical,
And, unbefogged by hero-worshippers,
Assign to each exact, impartial due.

HESPER.

There is a virtue rarer far than yours, —
The virtue that discerns nobility,
And reverences greatness. Critics ever
Suspect the higher motives of the great
And hearken to the lower. Criticism
Is thus the measure of the critic's self,
Not of his subject. We Americans
Deem that we prove our cleverness, and prove
Our specious doctrine of equality,
By doubting those above us, dragging them

Down to the splash and riot of the mob.
Democracy should raise the rabble up
Till all shall walk the level of the best.

BLACKMAR.

I have no fondness for the masses ; still,
I make allowance for our country's youth.

HESPER.

Our youth ! the trite and false excuse ! We date
From Runnymede, and all the Past is ours
To counsel and instruct. Nations ere this
Have in the compass of a single age
Wrought deeds that shine forever. Not to learn
Their novel engines and their tricks of trade
We seek them, but to know their wisdom, art,
And those best beacons to our own success,
The great achievements of superior men.
Judæa, Athens, do our thinking still ;
And were all Britain rotting in her grave,
Shakespeare has cut an epitaph to make
Her fame immortal.

BLACKMAR.

Ralph, you're eloquent,
And might turn politician. Grant all this,
A living vice may be of more avail
Than a dead virtue. For example, see
Those modern Argonauts who steer their course
For Californian gold, — a cut-throat crew,
Which, notwithstanding, will hew out a home
For decent men in future. But we range

Beyond my first intent. Let us suppose
That, having jilted your inheritance,
You follow your caprice and go to work.
Well, after twenty years, or even ten,
You might, with luck, be comfortably rich ;
What then? The present problem brings you to the
wall,

And you must then, where you should now, begin.
See life, see men and women, know your chance ;
A little folly, not indulged too far,
I don't forbid, — it serves to teach a man
To prize reality, it gives him ease.
If you will scowl and grumble in your tub,
How fatuous your vaunt of knowing life !
Ere you condemn, consent at least to try.
Your duty to your mother you forget ;
Your conduct grieves her ; but I cannot think
Her cares and wishes touch you not.
Be reasonable ; none at twenty-five
Can map out such a certain course of life
As that on wise old custom's chart. Submit.
Trust my maturer judgment and good-will
To lead to happiness. Enough ; it's late ;
There's whist to-night, and I must go. Good-by.
Ponder my counsel well, and follow it.

[*Exit* BLACKMAR.]

HESPER.

O mentor most considerate, most sage,
Who pick your syllables to suit my youth,
Accept my gratitude ! I must obey,
Or wear the dunce's-cap. How simple, too : —

You need but know the world, see men and women,
In order to be happy ! He condones
A sip of folly ; and he frowns not on
The wanton escapades and tosspot wastes
Which in the vulgar pass for common vice,
But in the rich display uncommon breeding.
Be drunk with rum, and you're a boorish sot ;
Champagne still leaves its drunkards gentlemen !
A most discreet distinction. On the day
When masks shall fall, and every soul appear
In aspect naked and original,
How many wives shall shudder at the lusts
They have espoused, mistaking them for men !
How many husbands, undeceived, shall loathe
The vanities they led away from church,
In fashion's peacock plumage ! Deacons, priests,
All shorn of sanctimonious disguise,
Unreverend, ungodly shall appear.
Then virtue shall be known, too long despised,
Because of modest garb and lowly mien ;
And many a heart now hid in loneliness
Shall shed as pure and sympathetic light
As did the Holy Grail. Break soon, oh day
Of rare surprises and grotesque events !
Good uncle, then, when truth has pulled from thee
Thy metaphysic cloak, I may not know
Thy remnant self. Ye gracious heavens, forbid !
Oh contumely and caprice of fate,
Why thrust us unconsulted in a sphere
Abhorrent to our natures ? Why, by ties of kin,
Withhold us when in other spheres we seek
Our proper mates ? Sarcastic and absurd

The lot that drew for Hesper such an uncle !
I owe my mother gratitude and love —
Nay, owe it not, for love is not a debt ;
And were she not my mother, I should love
Her womanly benignance : yet, alas !
Affection oft is baffled in its wish
Because it blindly would enforce that wish
On the beloved ; but wise-eyed Sympathy,
Which doth divine a comrade's highest aim,
And makes herself the ladder which he mounts,
She is the chosen deputy of Love.
Dear mother, whilst you dream that in the world's
Inspid, unsubstantial show, content
Awaits me if I will, I scan a world
Your gentle eyes have never seen : I ache
With doubts your faith prevents from harming you.
Alas ! that man should wear an aspen heart,
To veer and flutter Life and Death between !
Wishing to live, if Life be rid of cares,
Wishing to die, if Death reward with rest,
Singly content with neither Death nor Life,
Yet asking for the sovereign gift of each,
As one might beg from haughty day the sun,
And from the night the moon, for special light
And simultaneous beauty ! Nay,
We must explore the outmost avenues
And ransack every path of being, ere
We sneak through the coward's postern. I have seen
A gentle-hearted actor play the rage
Of Desdemona's too-suspicious lord,
Until in thrice a thousand bosoms quaked
A single consternation. Could he feign

A fury so repugnant to his soul,
Distil from mildness so innative wrath,
And for an evening metamorphose self
Into a creature most unlike himself,
Yet cannot I, through the brief play of life,
Be just myself, and laugh at circumstance?
Let Fate rain uncles and malignant checks,
I swear to be the being I prefer.

Act Second.

SCENE I. — *A Walk.*

HESPER (*alone*).

Motionless in the desert broods the Sphinx :
Before her file perpetual caravans
Across the wavy sands, beyond her ken ;
She sees, anon, fantastical mirage
Paint its seductive brilliance on the bare
And tremulous horizon ; still she broods,
In changeless isolation, desert-hemmed.
Are all the forms and persons which compose
This strange and motley pageantry of life,
Streaming confused before me, without pause, —
Are these but phantasms and incarnate dreams
Of outward Nature, which elude my touch ;
Or are they emanations of my mind,
Parts of myself, and symbols of my soul ?
Is each man centre of a universe,
Embodied kismet, or a little reed
Whereon Fate plays a temporary tune,
And then throws by unheeded ? Speculation
Conducts us to the adamant wall
We may not penetrate, we cannot scale.
Hark ! an old fiddle scrapes ! My uncle comes.

[*Enter* BLACKMAR and DARNEL.

BLACKMAR.

Ah, Ralph, well met ! We just now spoke of you.
You know my friend ?

DARNEL.

Yes ; long have Ralph and I
Enjoyed acquaintance — friendship, I may say.

HESPER (*aside*).

Indeed ! how jauntily some lips pronounce
The sacred name of friend ! — You spoke of me ?
No slander or disparagement ?

DARNEL.

Oh, no !

I'd be the last to hear a friend abused ;
And then your uncle sets his praise so high
That the incredulous, who know you not,
Would swear he flatters you ; but I'll go bail
No flattery could overtake the truth.

HESPER.

How rare to be the idol of our friends !
Since I am certain of your sweet esteem,
Let's forego present incense.

DARNEL.

Modest Ralph !

BLACKMAR.

Darnel was swelling with his favorite theme,
His Southern goddess, who has lately come ;

And he insists we take a peep at her.
Most lovers love exclusively ; but he,
Treble assurèd of his lady's heart,
Invites the world to marvel at his prize.

DARNEL.

True love can't harbor kill-joy jealousy.
Perchance my sin is pride ; for I delight
That each who sees my beauty must adore,
And that adoring he will curse his doom —
There is no second Constance for himself.
I know my fortune by his storm of sighs.
Let us go now.

BLACKMAR.

We'll watch Ralph's fresher eyes
Open in wonder. You and I long since
First felt the deep, resistless spells of women ;
He has but read or dreamed of them, and thinks
We overrate their magic.

DARNEL.

Constance, Ralph,
Will shame your scepticism. Though he were flint,
Who looks on her must perish from despair.

HESPER (*aside*).

Should I e'er love, may I be innocent
Of the unleashed, bombastic lover's tongue,
And keep exalted silence. — I am ready
To face this charming peril.

DARNEL.

Then, away!

But, friends, I beg you will not yet disclose
What I have told in strictest confidence
Of our engagement, though yourselves may read
In Constance's mien the summing of my joy.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II. — *A Drawing-room.* CONSTANCE ROMAINÉ, *at a piano, sings:*

*Whenever gentle thoughts would nest,
They fly to my Belovèd's breast;
Soothed on her heart they sleep and wake,
Like swans upon a placid lake.
When lovely wishes are astir,
For our delight, they visit her;
They shine their meaning in her eyes,
And in her smiles paint paradise.*

*I watch her through the orchard pass,
And through the waving upland grass, —
The very clover loves her foot,
And not a bird to her is mute!
Now she has gone behind the hill,
And yet, methinks, I see her still,
Upon her lovely mission bent, —
To bring the sick encouragement.*

*Now she has reached the cottage-door,
And now has crossed the threshold o'er:*

*What sudden radiancies illumine
The dying farmer's darkened room !
What music lulls his drowsy ears
As her consoling voice he hears !
He murmurs : " Wife, at last is come
The Angel who will lead me home."*

A touching song — if it were only true !
I wonder whether poets really burn
With the same passion they inspire ; or if,
Like those who tell ghost-stories, they enjoy
The telling, though they credit not the tale ?
Yet, ere they win the power to sway our hearts,
They must have entered there, and felt themselves
Our secretest emotions. Ah, but how ?

[*Sings.*

*Love made a trusty heart
Only for thee :
Try not to pick its lock —
Love has the key.*

Love, love, love ! Oldest theme, and still the sweetest,
Let worldlings slur it how they will. Let those
Whose hearts are jaded, or too miserly
To entertain this god, decry his worth ;
Where he is guest, is all the soul desires, —
More than all treasures of the world besides.
See what a subtle conjurer he is !
Thinking on him, though I have never loved,
At his mere name, my thoughts take on the tint
And glow of passion, — feel prophetic joy !

[*Enter a servant.*

SERVANT.

Three gentlemen are waiting.

CONSTANCE (*reading from their cards*).

Darnel, Blackmar, Hesper, — ask them in.

[*Exit servant.*]

I'm piqued to see the feather of the friends

Who flock with Darnel, the importunate.

[*Enter DARNEL, BLACKMAR, and HESPER. After greeting and introduction, CONSTANCE continues.*]

You're welcome, gentlemen. (*To BLACKMAR.*) I've sometimes heard

Of you, sir, from our common friend.

DARNEL.

Indeed

You have: and I have talked so oft of you

To Ralph and Blackmar, that their whetted thirst

Could be restrained no longer, and their eyes

Must drink their fill of beauty; so we came.

CONSTANCE.

I think we ought to chide, not thank, the friends

Who load us with embarrassment of praise.

HESPER (*aside*).

By all my dreams, but she is beautiful!

BLACKMAR.

Believe me, Darnel utters not a word

I will not ratify.

CONSTANCE (*to HESPER*).

And are not you
Adept in flattery?

DARNEL.

Nay, ask him not.
He's one of those deluded youths who play
The dismal rôle of Timon, sweeping men
And women under his promiscuous ban.
The part ill suits him, as we can assert
Who know his character from bark to core.

CONSTANCE (*to HESPER*).

Ah, ha! I hope no woman's faithlessness
Has seemed to prop your scorn. But even then,
'T were hardly just to wreak upon our sex
Revenge for one delinquent. Be gallant!

- HESPER.

These gentlemen, as I suspect, do jest:
I mind it not, although 't is inhumane
That oft the crippled children of their wit
Should limp away, unnoticed by a smile —
For only boys, or rough and cruel men
Laugh at deformities. I have no feud
With women, nor am I pope to ban them.

DARNEL.

You'd be no pope if you banned petticoats!
But, notwithstanding, shunning them till now,
You've tacitly confessed your disesteem.

CONSTANCE.

Still, there is hope of pardon and amends,
Since ignorance, not malice, was the cause.

HESPER.

I have mistaken, as it seems to me,
The object of our visit, which, I thought,
Was centred in our hostess rather than
In my poor self. To draw and tease my views,
By bantering thrusts, is but a sorry sport,
Unfit to entertain her; farther, sirs,
If I had need of a confessor's ear,
I'd choose, perhaps, nor you, nor you to shrive me;
And 't is allowed the meanest penitent
To tell his sins in private. Miss Romaine
Can scarcely wish to coax a stranger's folly
From his own lips. It's most presumptuous
To think that such a hermit-thrush as I
Should rouse her interest; but if I do,
My uncle here, or Darnel, when I'm gone,
Can tell more of me than I know myself.

BLACKMAR.

Fie, wayward Ralph!

CONSTANCE.

No, cunning, sir, instead!
He's heard we women can't sit patiently
Before a secret — leastwise, one forbidden:
I contradict the hearsay by my silence.
So, Bluebeard, keep your tantalizing key,
I will not pry among your skeletons.

But come! the topic darkens. (*To DARNEL.*) Will
not you,
Best-known of all, suggest a merrier?

HESPER (*aside*).

Another disillusion? Heart, be brave!

DARNEL.

You cannot doubt what favor I prefer, —
To hear you sing.

CONSTANCE.

Yes, if your friends agree.

BLACKMAR.

I beg you'll be so kind.

HESPER.

And I.

CONSTANCE.

Then hear
This little song, "The Violin's Complaint."

*Honest Stradivari made me;
With the gift of love he blest me;
Once — delight! a master played me,
Love awoke when he caressed me.*

*Oh the deep, ecstatic burning!
Oh the secrets low and tender!
Oh the rapture and the yearning,
At our love's complete surrender!*

*Heartless men, so long to hide me
'Mong the costly toys you cherish!
I'm a soul: again confide me
To a lover, ere I perish!*

BLACKMAR.

Delightful!

DARNEL.

Charming! how the melody
Explains the words! Quite realistic!

BLACKMAR.

Yes!

CONSTANCE.

And were you pleased?

HESPER.

Exceedingly, I thank you.

Pray take my silence as the fittest proof
Of my enjoyment. I would not be the first
To toss a trite, unmeaning epithet
Into the tranquil pool of ecstasy
Music has flooded with her streams divine.

CONSTANCE.

Then you are fond of music?

HESPER.

“Fond”? That word's
Too dwarfish to express my vast delight.
When music plays, there is no tiniest chord

In all my frame but trembles to respond :
She gives a tongue to each emotion, blends
My soul and body in harmonious speech.
Methinks the common talk of man with man
Would be attuned to such a unison,
If each sincerely spoke his highest thought.
We pitch our voices down to custom's key,
And jangling insincerity o'erdins
The sweet and natural music of our souls.
Have you, at daybreak, never with amaze
Beheld the sun — that arch-magician — touch
With his translucent wand earth, sea, and sky,
Till from the raven coverlid of night,
All things awake to Beauty, — till no cloud,
Or peak, or blossom, leaf or airy mote,
Or curving cheek of momentary wave,
Or any living creature, but exults
In its full meed of color and of light, —
Light, which is friendship ; Color, which is love ?
So Music brims with her pervasive tide
All labyrinths and crannies of the soul,
Till all would sing from overflow of joy !

CONSTANCE.

Music you praise so nobly, you must be
Yourself a skilled musician.

HESPER.

Ah, if those
Who deeply feel could all they feel express,
The sacred circle of the master Few
Would gird a multitude !

CONSTANCE.

I know that truth ;
And having not this boon of utterance,
I make me glad revering that of others.
'T is the eternal privilege of art,
By sharing to increase : he who gets wealth,
In land or money, may in those deprive
His fellows. Art alone can hoard by giving.
Enrich us by a song.

HESPER.

What shall it be?

CONSTANCE.

You choose — the better way to match your mood.

HESPER.

Good ! Here 's an air I heard in Venice once.

[Sings.]

*“ Roam with me in my garden fair !
Its beauties and wonders thou shalt share,
If thou 'lt roam with me.
There 's not a flower that blossoms there,
But storeth honey and sweetens the air, —
There 's not a butterfly, bird, or tree,
But has joy for thee.*

*“ Many enchanted paths we 'll rove,
O'er hill and dale, through valley and grove,
If thou 'lt roam with me.*

*It matters not whither our footsteps wend,
From pleasure to pleasure the paths all tend,
For in fairyland there is never an end
Of felicity.*

*“ Perchance in a shadowy copse we’ll find
The circle of Poets round Homer blind;
Perchance we’ll surprise,
In some deep meadow of asphodel,
Beautiful Proserpine; or dwell
A whole year through in the blissful spell
Of Apollo’s eyes.*

✓ *“ We will wander down to the sounding shore,
✓ And th’ horizon’s fugitive charm explore, -
In our stanch, swift boat;
Or we’ll watch each royal wavelet rise
For its crown of sunbeams ere it dies;
Or the ship-like clouds in the western skies,
As we idly float.*

*“ Night shall furnish a mossy bed,
And down through the foliage overhead
The stars will peep;
And we will whisper, with many a kiss,
Of all our passion, of all our bliss,
Till we glide together o’er Dreams’ abyss,
On the wings of Sleep.*

*“ Oh, life is long and our pulses strong,
And days are flooded with mirth and song
And a joy divine!*

*Come, Heart's-delight! let us haste, let us roam
From joy to joy in this boundless home!
For all the beautiful world is mine,
And I — am thine!"*

*So the Stripling sang with the glow of youth,
But Sorrow approached in the garb of Truth,
With the sober years;
And Hope she crooned in a plaintive key;
And Joy sped, saying, "I'm not for thee,
Let Fortitude now thy pilot be,
Till thou pass these fears."*

*"Oh, deceitful days and hurrying world,
Must I ever from change to change be hurled!"
In despair, Man cried.
"Yesterday's charms no more allure, —
What passion to-day will to-morrow endure?
If nothing can stay, if nothing is sure,
Oh, will Love abide?"*

BLACKMAR.

Bravo! you never sang so well before.

DARNEL.

Yes, capital. A love-sick troubadour
Would relish that romance.

CONSTANCE.

It's sweet, but sad.

Why is 't that melancholy music charms
Even the gay; whereas when we behold

A grieving friend, we grieve from sympathy,
Without the sooth of pleasurable pain?
I sometimes dread lest the too frequent stroke
Of dulcet notes should mesmerize my soul
To sensuous lethargy. I seldom hear
The quick alarum and sonorous peal
That match my dream's ambition. I dream deeds!
You men I envy most your free career
Of action in the State. How glorious
To be an orator, to see the throng,
A mighty forest, bending to your voice!
To see your policy, like vernal sap,
Quickened each branch, and bourgeon in each twig!
To hear the thunders of convinced applause —
Ah, that were music! And to know your foes
Must perish or surrender — that were fame!
I wonder that there breathes a single man
Unkindled by th' Olympian draught of power!
Had women but your chance!

BLACKMAR.

You Southerners

Are born diplomatists: here in the North
Our better folk despise the politicians,
Who howl their burning questions, issues, frauds, —
Devices all to keep themselves in place.
The marvel is our people can adopt
Their quarrels. Gulls and gullers make the world.
These knaves, who stab each other in their rant,
For partisan effect, carouse and wink
In private, like attorneys out of court.

CONSTANCE.

You speak of knaves ; of statesmen, I.

BLACKMAR.

Two names,

But not two persons : you are more polite,
I more exact in naming, — that is all.

DARNEL (*to* CONSTANCE).

But take them even at your estimate,
You scant your sex's power. Grant that men
Rule politics — pray tell me who rule men?
Why, women ; and their influence compels
No less, though it be subtile and remote.
I know two eyes which, were I senator,
Would govern all my votes.

CONSTANCE.

Your common ruse

To flatter us to silence ! But we know
That in your hearts you scorn our intellects,
As if they were emotional machines,
Wound up by prejudice or sentiment.

DARNEL.

May chivalry forbid such calumny !
We value you, we worship, we adore ;
And if our worship top not your deserts,
'T is that our powers fail us, being men
Confined in natures earthlier than yours.

HESPER (*aside*).

Most gaudy words ! but will they dazzle her ?

CONSTANCE.

Do you believe this ?

DARNEL.

Can you doubt my faith ?

CONSTANCE.

Then you 're a man who will not hesitate
To prove your noble precepts, and you shall.

HESPER (*aside*).

Oh woman's eyes ! beguiled by painted gems !

DARNEL.

You 'll find me always ready for the test :
Let it be soon, if you consult my zeal.

BLACKMAR.

And I 'll be umpire. Darnel shall subscribe
A plum for Woman's Rights ; then, let me see, —
Then he shall take the stump, and Miss Romaine
Shall judge how ably he presents her cause.
May you both see a president in skirts
And congressmen in crinoline, before you die.

CONSTANCE.

How obstinately men refuse to yield
To women deep convictions ! We must be

The playthings you would have us, or you mock.
But, for the nonce, be politics tabooed.
Through the long summer which before us lies
I hope to greet you often, hope to show
My reasons are not whims ; and you shall state
Your most profound objections. We will chat
From theme to theme, in friendship's easy wont ;
And when discussion waxes sultry, you (*to HESPER*)
Shall send us showers of refreshing song.

BLACKMAR.

A siren plan !

DARNEL.

Enticing as its source !

BLACKMAR.

And for to-day, if 't please you, we propose
To sail. My yacht awaits us ; brisk 's the wind,
Not boisterous ; all urges your consent.
Darnel assured us you 've a sailor's heart.

CONSTANCE.

I have, indeed. There 's blood within my veins —
Drops from a viking ancestor, perchance, —
Which dances to the music of the sea,
And stagnates when ashore. I 'll gladly go
In an hour.

DARNEL.

Good !

BLACKMAR.

At three we will return.
Till then, farewell. The yacht shall leap with joy
To bear a viking's daughter.

DARNEL.

True! Good-by.

CONSTANCE.

The French is better; *au revoir* till three.

[BLACKMAR, DARNEL, and HESPER take leave.
A strange consorting, — eagle, buzzard, jay!

SCENE III. — *A Walk.* BLACKMAR and DARNEL.

BLACKMAR.

Gad, Darnel, you have trapped a prize!
But you must bag her patiently, else she
Will break away. The time to tire and tame
These haughty beasties is before you wed:
Once tamed, they're docile always.

DARNEL.

Never fear!
I'll have one master in my house — myself.

BLACKMAR.

How will Camille, who gambolled off the boards,
To share your golden favor, like your wife?
Those wenches, like disease, are quicker caught
Than rid of.

DARNEL.

Money buys the night-bird's song,
Money shall buy her silence. If she scream,
The law shall hush her in a padded cage.
I'll see to it, when I lead home my bride,
No cast-off jade, with whining brat in arms,
Greet us upon the door-step.

[HESPER appears in the background; seeing them, he is
about to retire, but is observed by BLACKMAR.]

BLACKMAR.

Ho, Ralph! Here!

HESPER.

What do you want?

BLACKMAR.

An answer to a riddle.

HESPER.

Then seek a parson or an editor, —
They only are omniscient.

BLACKMAR.

No! but stay;
My riddle's easy: have you lately seen
Our fair Virginian?

HESPER (*approaching*).

On Saturday
I met her on the beach. Not since, I think.

BLACKMAR.

Jove ! what a captivating witch it is !
Were I your age, or were I not content
With the snug freedom of a bachelor,
I swear I 'd join the chase, — make Darnel spurt
To beat me.

DARNEL.

She is richly worth a run.
Lucky for me, I have a winning lead,
And dare to smile at backward rivals.

BLACKMAR.

Ralph,
When you pick out a wife, make this your rule :
A woman must possess three requisites, —
Blood, beauty, wealth.

DARNEL.

And most imports the last.
The other two are casual ornaments
Of happy wedlock ; but a golden dower
Compensates men who blunder in their choice.
See what she has in bank before you woo,
Then be a leech at wooing — slights, rebuffs,
Of no avail to brush the zealot off.
There never lived a woman but succumbed
To unremitted and protesting suit :
If not their heart, their pride at last is won.

HESPER.

By Lucifer ! this is most damnable !

BLACKMAR.

Nay, it is prudent. Prudence should control
Us always, and in marriage most of all.
“Love in a cottage” may have answered once;
But cottages are turned to tenements,
And squalor there, and poverty, and crime
Leave love no perch to coo on. Ne’ertheless,
That she you choose be rich, need not abate
Your young romantic ardor.

HESPER.

I despise
Your heresy against the creed of love.
I’ll not believe that you yourselves believe it.
Darnel, confess, my uncle’s cynic trick
Maligins himself and you. No criminal
Would publish thus his baseness.

DARNEL.

Ralph, you’re young.
In time you’ll understand and imitate
Maturer men, who fortify each gap
Against the storm of possible mischance.
To dally with, one woman’s like the next,
And may be caught without a wedding-ring;
But say you’re surfeited, as must occur,
Pray what indemnity, what recompense,
From penniless wife, for years of misery?

HESPER.

Then you imply that were not Constance rich
You would not wed her?

DARNEL.

 If you put it thus,
Although I value all her other charms,
I'll not deny what any man must praise
As rare sagacity.

HESPER.

 Then I declare
You are a mercenary villain !

DARNEL.

 God !
You beardless prig ! you damnèd cur ! You dare
Insult me ?

HESPER.

 Yes. It needs no Hercules
To dare expose the craven. You've confessed
You plot against this lady for her wealth, —
To pilfer that you steal into her heart,
Just as a burglar steals into a house
To rob its silver ; honest men agree
A burglar is a villain and a sneak.

DARNEL.

By heaven and hell ! you shall retract your lies !

BLACKMAR.

Come, come, no blows.

HESPER.

 There is no danger, sir.
These sneaking bipeds have not so much pluck.

As e'en a trampled viper. As for threats,
Who was e'er harmed by cowards' blank discharge?
Stuff up your tender ears with cotton, sir,
If the noise disturbs you.

DARNEL.

By my honor, hound,
You shall give satisfaction! You shall fight!

HESPER.

The duel is an antiquated crime,
Fit for a strutting Frenchman, or a bully.
Suppose you made my body as a sieve,
And through a score of vents my soul flew out, —
Although I died, you still would live, still be
A villain.

DARNEL.

But for your uncle, now,
Upon this spot you'd pay me. Well you chose
A coward's lurch of time. But never fear,
I swear my vengeance you shall not escape.

BLACKMAR.

Hold, Ralph! This goes too far. I'll not permit
An angry nephew to abuse my friend.
Quick, I command you, an apology.

HESPER.

When you shall prove that you have wronged yourself
In calling him your friend, I'll recognize
Your right to order me.

BLACKMAR.

Insult me too?

The fellow's crazed, and will befoul us all
With his promiscuous frenzy. I'll not stay
To be a madman's target. When he's sane
He shall repent, and humbly beg our pardon.
Insult me! Monstrous! Darnel, leave him! Come!

DARNEL.

Thank Blackmar that I leave you in your skin.
Had I as many as the aloe's tongues,
They all should hiss a curse. You'll smart for this.

BLACKMAR.

Ungrateful wretch!

[*Exeunt* BLACKMAR and DARNEL.]

HESPER.

Go, weasel-brood!

Scatter, scatter! I have you on the run.
I scented your foul purpose from afar, —
But what avails me this discovery?
For knew I not already rogues may wear
Starched linen and a gentleman's repute?
Oh, the sad, shameful, hypocritic world!
I see a rascal snatch a stranger's purse,
I apprehend him, and prevent the theft:
But when I see a social villain trick
A woman for her fortune, I must lay
My finger on my lip, in tacit, base
Inaction. "Let those whom the fraud concerns,
Defend themselves against it," says the world.

Why should I meddle? What is she to me?
Not yet a friend who might be warned by friend;
Only a late acquaintance, who excites
A tantalizing pleasure, bitter-sweet,
Attractive and repellent. When I think
How like a dove she emblems gentleness,
Lo! on a sudden comes the magic change
Into a tigress, haughty, fearless, strong, —
A tawny, agile terror to her foes,
But to her friends a puissant sentinel;
And whether she seem tigress or show dove,
In both she's beautiful. Does she love him?
How tell when woman loves? Yet plain it is,
As compliments and hints corroborate,
He has her special favor. It must be
That if she loves, she loves his glamouring mask,
Or an unreal, imaginary Darnel
Her fancy cheats her with. Oh the blind eyes
And wilful trust of women! Riddles all!
Gods will not save a victim that prefers
Destruction! I must stand aloof and watch,
Until the opportune, appointed hour
Compels me to the rescue. Thus we wait,
Like helpless eaglets, for the fledge of fate.

[Exit.]

SCENE IV. — *A Cliff overlooking the Sea.* HESPER in reverie.

HESPER.

✧ Impartial Nature bids her seasons forth
Regardless of our wishes. Autumn wakes:

His filmy-frosty breathing pales the view
At either twilight, though there 's summer still
I' the feel of noon. What flocks of orioles
Or strayed Brazilian birds have lately spread
Their gorgeous plumes upon our foliage !
What vintagers have pressed their purplest grapes
Into the ocean, till it seem a bowl
Of old Falernian ! These shifting scenes —
This pageant-progress of the nimble months —
Divert me and surprise ; but more attracts
The tragic-comic intercourse of men
In life's great passion-play. Perchance, perchance,
Out of the throng, in tones familiar,
That voice will hail me which my spirit craves.
The landscape and the ocean — e'en the stars —
Which in my youth I fancied would reveal
Their secret to me if I patiently
Would listen, all are dumb. To human ears
A human voice must speak. — But if I hark
Unanswered, if this world-old spectacle
Of strife unending, niggardly success,
Elusive happiness, and sure demise,
Should weary or appall me, Nature, still
In thee shall I behold, with larger awe,
A Power perpetual, an Order fixed,
Which ever after winter brings the spring,
Unmoved 'mid change, and of all ages keeps
One age alone — imperishable Youth.
Lizards that bask their little hour away
On Thebes' stupendous mole, then gleaming dart
Into oblivion, are not more dull
Than we who fret our brief permitted time

Among these portents of infinitude.
Brief, if the drama close abruptly here !
What if it run hereafter ? Who would raise
So glorious and permanent a stage
For players merely mortal ? These are flights
Hope only dares to venture ; Reason walks.
Yet when o'erfreighted by the sense of crime
Or suffering immense ; or when perplexed
By the imbrangled wrongs and slurs of Fate ;
Or sick at heart from hopeless solitude,
Which is forever haunted by the form
Of one we love who never can be ours, —
Then, sadly grateful, we reflect that Death,
The good physician, with his poppy draught,
Has heard our cry, is on his way to heal.
Courage a little ! we shall slumber soon.

CONSTANCE (*appearing on a ledge above HESPER*).

You, too, have found this nook of reverie !
Perhaps you scold intruders, for of late —
A month at least — you 've almost shunned my house ;
And when by chance we 've met, you 've curtly bowed,
Dropped a "good-morning," and passed quickly on.
Shall I not say 't is most unchivalrous ?

HESPER.

I 'm one reputed most unsocial, and
Deserve my reputation. Lately, too,
A mood uncommon and tumultuous
Has urged me to the ocean, where I find,

If not tranquillity, a vast unrest,
Variety, and fathomless desire,
Consorting with my own.

CONSTANCE.

You were more wise,
Confiding in a friend, to ease your grief.

HESPER.

Had I a comrade who could reassure,
I'd need no reassurance; having none,
'Tis better to be silent than complain
In ears unsympathetic.

CONSTANCE.

I divine
You hide a deeper reason. You believe
We're all unworthy of your confidence :
But have you tried us all? And what great truth,
Which shrinks, like guilty words, from tip of tongue,
Have you to tell? Sometimes the stately-silent,
Who seem like oysters mewing priceless pearls,
Are taciturn from very lack of thought.

HESPER.

Most pleasant scoffer !

CONSTANCE.

Sir, I do not scoff.
Oh no ! we women are inquisitive —
But you can't know, because you know not women.

HESPER.

You wrong me, if you charge my ignorance
To sullenness. I've studied in your school,
Have conned your virtues and conflicting flaws,
Your graces, contradictions, maddening ways —
Bewitching paradoxes! — till my brain,
Astonished, could no more. When I, amazed,
Have marvelled that such attributes as make
The spotless seraphim the joy of heaven,
With earth could be compounded, some defect,
Most earthly, has redoubled my amazement.
I have seen favors which a Percival,
The paragon of knights, had not deserved,
Bestowed with spendthrift largess on a boor.

CONSTANCE.

And therefore you condemn us all, retreat
Into your selfish and superior shell,
To pity or despise us! Have you thought,
We women are but half the world, you men
The other half? Be just: divide the blame;
Nay, more, bear some of ours, because our state
Is chiefly fixed by you. You have assigned
The sphere we must accept. With larger scope,
In the free air, what might we not aspire!
If men flew skyward, we would wing with them.
You like to hear us sing, to see us perch
Upon your finger. You would have us pure,
That, when you've splashed and swum to weariness
In Folly's pool, we may wash off the stains.
Do we refuse? Do we recriminate?

Suppose we beggar artifice to please —
Do you not strive to rule? And you ignore
That courtesy is woman's second nature.
Shall I insult all those who please me not? —
The blemish clings to me. Take any case,
And strip it to the pith: say I resent,
As pique might urge, your testy prejudice, —
Whom should I punish? Say I shut my door
On Darnel and all insincerity —

HESPER.

Do you not love him, then?

CONSTANCE.

Love Darnel? Him?

Oh the keen vision of the wary blind!
I answer your suspicion with a laugh.

HESPER (*aside*).

Dawn hope, and pack away despair! — And yet
A weightier rumor is abroad, — it's said
You'll shortly marry him.

CONSTANCE.

I did believe

You lived above the scandalous reports
And tattle of the world. Life is too short
To waste in contradicting random lies;
But those who know us, surely they should trust,
Or what besteads us friendship? Must we run
To every friend, at any hour, and say,

“ ’T is gossiped I ’m a thief : believe it not ” ?

If those who know me deem that I could wed

A man whose eyes are always on my purse,

I pity their credulity. Farewell !

Learn women better, if you would be just.

The incoherent murmurs of this sea —

Monotonous and husky, but sincere —

Rebuke your cheap suspicion. List to them.

[*Exit* CONSTANCE.]

HESPER.

Dupe, dupe, and dormouse ! Hoodwinked by my fear,

I read all signs to justify my fear :

Saw dignity in the false shape of pride,

Took graciousness for love, blurred everything.

Dolt ! get thee to a school : the censure lies

In staying foolish, when we may be wise.

[*Exit.*]

SCENE V. — *A Garden. Behind, the Cottage occupied by*

CONSTANCE. *Moonlight. HESPER and CONSTANCE.*

HESPER.

Say but once more, and seal it with a kiss,

I love thee !

CONSTANCE.

Hesper, I love thee —

HESPER.

Oh bliss !

CONSTANCE.

I am forever thine, and thou art mine, —
The joy, the marvel of it !

HESPER.

Let me look
Into those clear true eyes again, which saw
Some merit in me, through the worthless mask
That hid me from myself. So — in the moonlight.
Oh, let me touch those lips, whose soft *I love thee*
Redeems my soul ! Oh happiness beyond
The utmost peep of fancy ! Now the world
Grows full, and sweet, and strong, — a mighty heart !
I feel the pulses of all virtue, passion,
And all divine desires throb in my frame.
There is no mystery, there is no doubt ;
Hope, joy, love, God — I clasp thee in my arms !

CONSTANCE.

How wonderful, my Hesper, is the peace
Of perfect passion. I believe the stars,
And yonder moon, and these benignant trees,
And the faint lullaby of ocean, know
Our gladness, and rejoice.

HESPER.

And I believe
There are some spirits so serene and pure,
That on this actual earth they live in heaven.
How thin a web, by my perverseness spun
Across the entrance of thine Eden, Love,

Curtained my path to thee ! How long I groped !
Woe unto me if I had groped in vain !

CONSTANCE.

Hush ! that one *if* glides like a serpent here,
Presaging harm ; for doubt, or of the past
Or of the future, harms and darkens love.
But, Hesper, in the union of two souls
There is no chance. Chance rules, perhaps, events ;
But love 's the very breath and essence of
The soul, beyond the scythe of circumstance.
Chance may divide two natures with one love,
For one year or a score, but though apart
He drove them through a score of lives, when met
They would commingle with sublime delight —
As we do now.

HESPER.

My Wisdom and my Joy,
Speak on ! Methinks I 've listened to thy voice
In immemorial lives. Which is the star
Wherein I heard thee first ? What date, what term,
What brief eclipse has touched, or can, our passion ?
Not first to-night, my better self, my soul,
I know thee.

[*A distant church clock strikes.*

CONSTANCE.

What ! do clocks still slave for Time ?
'T is late, to loveless watchers.

HESPER.

Ah, count not!

To think of Time, so soon! I would stay here
Forever, with thee nigh, and reckon not
The flight of seasons. I would talk of love
Till Night, entranced, should whisper to her mate,
And Day arose to wonder at our joy,
And he, bewildered, summoned Night again!
Time I'd annul. — A little, little while
Bless me by lingering. We've not yet begun
Our mutual story, — scarce a word
Yet uttered! Stay, until I better know
The rapture of thy hand — until I taste
The honey of thy lips — caress thy cheeks,
Thy brow — and fathom those celestial depths
Through which thy soul beholds me! Grant me this.

CONSTANCE (*starting*).

Hear'st thou no noise?

HESPER.

I hear Love speak.

CONSTANCE.

Nay, look,

There grates a keel upon the shingle!

HESPER.

What,

To earth again? Has Love no privilege?
Whose eyes, save those of angels, may presume
To peep when lovers pledge? — A skiff, a man, —

A thief, to judge him by his muffled oar.
I'll challenge this intruder.

CONSTANCE.

Love, beware!

HESPER.

Nay, there's no peril: only, go thou in.
I'll catechise this pagan who has dared
Within the hallowed precinct.

CONSTANCE.

Love, good-night.
To-morrow thou wilt come to me betimes?

HESPER.

Ay, ere the earliest sparrow chirps—

CONSTANCE.

Till then,
All happiness be thine. Good-night, good-night!

HESPER.

Oh, bid not him be happy who must trust
His jewel to the hazard of the dark.
God bless thee, Constance. Speed the night away!
[*After CONSTANCE has entered her cottage, HESPER goes
towards the shore; then presently returns.*
The knave, scarce landed, when he heard my steps,
Leaped to his boat again, and spurted off
Like a scared coot. But though he did not speak,
Between the shadow and the silver moon,

I knew him, Darnel. What an abject imp
To drag us down from Heaven! — Still? Alone?
Constance has gone, and it is dark indeed,
Except that here in memory she shines
Auroral. Eyes, upon that image dote!
Not Aphrodite, nor chaste Artemis,
Nor Hebe of the amaranthine blush;
Not Cleopatra, whose voluptuous arms,
Velvet and serpentine, did clip and thrall
Th' ambitious pinions of imperial pride;
Nor yet that later Queen, whose fatal grace
Herself and all her lovers rued, — not these,
Nor any other fair of large report
In history or fable (though she won
Throughout her mortal life the homage due
To Beauty's self immortal), but must pale
Before my peerless Love. I look at her,
Till sense is dazzled by superb excess,
And would avert its gaze, yet gazes on
In helpless ecstasy, delicious awe!
And then her large and radiant eyes appear
Ideal fountains, crystalline, wherein
The inmost lustres of her being shine
In sequent loveliness; and when she smiles,
Behold! around her lips imparadised,
Virtues benign and wishes gently strong,
Sisters to Youth eterne, and Joyousness;
And when she speaks, I hear what cadences
I fancied sweeten angels' high discourse,
But never dared to hope on earth to hear.
So are her features grown ethereal
And so sublimed, that motionless I gaze

In lowly adoration of her soul.
Those elder men who guessed the Old World creeds
Stablished for God mere man presumed colossal ;
Now, noble minds revolt from worshipping
Revengeful Allah, and Jehovah wroth,
And Jove, the dissolute, tyrannic Jove.
When Force was monarch, men-like gods sufficed ;
When Love shall reign, God shall be womanly, —
Pure, merciful, and just, loving and lovable.
Already dimly we surmise the form
Of that ineffable Apocalypse ! —
Soft ! Constance's window is ablaze with joy !

CONSTANCE (*appearing at an upper window*).

Nearing the point, I just discern the skiff.
Untimely and unkind to break upon our joy.
No lover held those oars : some lonely wretch,
Lonely as I am, Hesper being gone.
Oh Night, but now the very choice of Love, —
Fragrant and still, and dusk beneath the trees,
For passion's whispers, — thou art no more fair ;
Make way for morning, when my lover comes !
Ah, Hesper, is it thou ?

HESPER.

Who else should be
The guard and sentinel at Constance's door ?
Here would I dog the sluggish march of Night,
And while my eyes patrol the outposts here,
I'll picket Fancy nearer, nearer still

CONSTANCE.

But the intruder?

HESPER.

Gone, — a moonstruck waif
Who fled when I approached.

CONSTANCE.

Then all is well.
Once more, good-night! I pray thee, dearest, rest.
Stay — take this charm to lure the vagrant, Sleep.

HESPER.

A rose, made sweet and priceless by a kiss!

CONSTANCE.

Alas! that envious Nature should impose
These intervals on love! Good-night! good-night!
[Retires from the balcony.]

HESPER.

Dance towards the morning, Earth! Sing, sing, my
heart,
To waft thy mistress slumberwards.

[Sings.]

*Sleep, I covet thy delight,
Oh, to have thy power to-night!
Smoothly spread my Lady's bed, —
Downy pillows for her head,
And let violets perfume
The holy stillness of her room.*

*Gently, gently close her eyes, —
Pearly lids o'er sapphire skies, —
Gently close, until repose
Like soft music through her flows;
Mark how sweet her breathing slips —
But thou may'st not kiss her lips!*

*For a light, the dim moonbeams!
And thy mate, the God of Dreams,
Shall array a pageant gay
As her Fancy loves by day!
Oh, for fairy's eyes to see
If my Lady dreams of me.*

Her light is out! Oh, would that I might melt
My passion in one sweetest note, to steal
Through her delighted ears, and on her heart
Nestle till morning!

Act Third.

SCENE I. — *A Public Square.* HESPER *alone.*

HESPER.

Speed on ! speed on ! ye lagging days and weeks
Which clog the coming of that happy morn
When I shall wed. Pert, moody April, go
And beg thy beauteous sister, May, to haste.
E'en now I see her busy in her dell,
Where Youth holds up a glass, and Graces three
Attire their lovely sister, and bedeck
Her bridal-dress with blossoms and young leaves,
While Joy strays in a meadow, teaching larks
To carol her a welcome. Haste, oh haste !
The spring suffuses Nature with new hope,
Which, unconfined by ocean, earth, and sky,
O'erflows to human souls. My Love that art,
My wife that art to be, like gods we'll quaff
This rich elixir, till the very gods
Believe we're deathless too ! Let anxious times
Breed doubt in whom they may. Whilst I have thee,
What fitful omens of calamity,
What shudder of approaching strife, can fright
Hope from her citadel, our hearts ? Let those
Who called the fiends of discord up from hell,
Allay them and dismiss. We'll shine aloof,

Twin stars in Love's empyrean, and grieve
That brothers use the argument of Cain.

Hark to the drums, that beat out hate's tattoo!

[*Martial music. A company of volunteers marches into the square. The soldiers are escorted by their friends. HESPER withdraws to one side.*]

OFFICER.

Halt! My men, we are ready for the front. The train awaits us yonder. If you wish to say a last word to your friends, do so. Let your parting be brief, as befits a soldier; let it be brave, as befits men engaged in the noblest duty, — the defence of their country and their home.

[*The men break ranks.*]

A MOTHER.

Good-by, my son. God guard you, and bring you safely back to me.

A SOLDIER.

Good-by, mother. Don't be disheartened. You'll soon hear that we have crushed this rebellion; and then how proud you will be, that you had a son to help!

MOTHER.

Keep the little book I gave you. Bless you!

ANOTHER SOLDIER.

No tears, Nell.

A YOUNG WOMAN.

But if you should be wounded, if you should be —

SOLDIER.

Never fear! There's not much danger, after all; for when the Southerners see we are in earnest, they'll slink away without fighting. Be cheerful, Nell. I'll write you from Washington, and tell you how we live in camp. In a few months, long before frost, we shall return; and then, sweetheart, we'll marry. Choose the spot that pleases you best to build our cottage on. A year from now we shall have forgotten this trial, and we will never part again. Good-by, good-by, Nell.

YOUNG WOMAN.

Good-by. Remember me.

A WOMAN (*hurrying in excitedly*).

My boy! I want my boy!

A SOLDIER.

We're all men here. If he has n't played truant, look for your boy at school.

WOMAN.

He has run away from me. He must not go to the war.

OFFICER.

What is his name?

WOMAN.

Henry, sir ; Henry Masters.

OFFICER.

There 's no such name on the roll.

WOMAN.

Yes, there he is, behind those drummers. That 's he.

OFFICER.

Come here, Stone.

[A lad reluctantly comes forward.]

You enlisted as Charles Stone. Is that your name?

WOMAN.

No, sir. He 's my only boy, Henry Masters. His father 's dead, and I cannot spare him.

OFFICER.

Explain this. Why did you give a false name?

LAD.

I was afraid, sir, that my mother would find me out, and stop me from enlisting.

OFFICER.

What 's your age?

WOMAN.

He 's not fifteen ; he was fourteen last November.

OFFICER.

Too young, too young.

LAD.

But I'm as big as most fellows of eighteen. And I'm strong, and I must go. I must help the country, sir. I can keep with the drummers for a while, and then, when you see how tough I am, you'll give me a musket.

OFFICER.

It won't do, Masters. You ought to obey your mother. You must stay at home with her.

LAD.

Please, please, Captain, don't refuse me. I'm not afraid. With the drummers, I shall get used to being under fire. Give me a chance. Come, mother, don't forbid me. I will drum courage into the men when they go into battle: you would n't have them miss that.

WOMAN.

Alas! my precious boy, I cannot give you up.

OFFICER.

Enough. You shall not quit your mother. Fall in, men! March!

[*Martial music. Whilst the soldiers march away singing, their friends wave farewells to them, and gradually disperse.*]

*Tramp! tramp! to the beat of the drum,
And the sound of the merry fife.
Our country calls — we come, we come!
Good-by to lover and wife.*

*Tramp! tramp! while the Stars and Stripes
In the breeze of Freedom fly,
We pledge our blood to the righteous cause,
And the Union shall not die.*

HESPER (*coming forward as the chorus grows faint*).

What! can a boy who's scarce beyond the age
Of top and kite, thus urge a patriot's rights, —
Greedy to taste the war's vicissitudes!
Has Hesper, too, no country to defend?
Most noble boy! Your manly tears have washed
My duty clear! I've heard thy deep appeal,
My country, and I come. But Constance? Oh!
[*Exit.*

SCENE II. — MRS. HESPER and BLACKMAR.

MRS. HESPER.

It grieves me, brother, that my Ralph and you
Are still at odds. I hoped that you would smooth
Your difference ere this; why will you not?
I cannot bear that two so dear to me
Should so misprize each other.

BLACKMAR.

You forget

The provocation, but my self-respect
Has a long memory. Was 't not enough
Your son should flagrantly insult my friend,
But he must also hurl his gibes at me, —
At me, his uncle ; should insinuate
That I, no less than Darnel, am a rogue?

MRS. HESPER.

Alas ! I wish that hasty wrong unsaid.
But be not you too harsh. We must not judge
Hot words that flash from youth's brief, sudden clouds,
Like the affront of ripe, deliberate men.

BLACKMAR.

Pleas and excuses cannot salve the wound.
'T is evident — his later tricks confirm —
Ralph did not strike in haste : he planned the blow.
Darnel, he saw a rival on the crest
Of happy fortune ; jealousy contrived,
And baseness wrought, perdition. Were he not
Your son, how would you rate a man whose wiles
Enticed a woman from her earlier choice?

MRS. HESPER.

You wrong him, when you hint dishonor. He
Won Constance nobly. You are blind indeed
If you pretend she e'er showed Darnel favor.
Ah, brother, be magnanimous, be just :
I cannot suffer rancor to embitter

Their bridal happiness, or that yourself
Should farther nurse a grievance. I'll not ask
That you forgive outright; but if Ralph takes
The step towards reconciliation first,
Promise you'll not draw back.

BLACKMAR.

My dignity
Shall teach my act. But his apology,
Solicited by you, will not, be sure, suffice.
On his own prompting must he come to me, —
And as his insult had a double sting,
So his contrition must include my friend.

[*Exit.*

MRS. HESPER.

My brother's obdurate! pride magnifies
A trivial offence; yet must I urge redress.
Ralph shall retract, and so the quarrel ends.
And yet I would not have him lower bend
Than just his fault requires.

[*Enter HESPER.*

Welcome, my son.
I have grave matter to confer with you.

HESPER.

Have you so soon divined my late resolve?

MRS. HESPER.

Your uncle —

HESPER.

Nay, our country, she it is
Of whom I speak. I dedicate my life
Henceforth to her. I volunteer to-day.

MRS. HESPER.

Impossible, my son, impossible !
You must not leave me — Constance you forget.

HESPER.

I have forgotten none. I've held the scales
Whilst love and duty trembled, till the side
Where duty pressed, inevitably sank ;
Again, again, I've cross-examined both,
Yet ever, urgent as the trump of doom,
A voice commands me, *Go*.

MRS. HESPER.

Reflect :

To act upon this hasty resolution,
Though seeming-high, would not less be a wrong.
Your life belongs to us, as well as you ;
Let those who have no ties —

HESPER.

And who is he

So wretched, vile, inhuman, or supreme,
That Nature has not bound him to his race?
Who's he can truly say : *I have no kin :*
Myself am my own end? There lives not one
Outside the clasp of those mysterious cords
By which the currents of our kinship pulse

Forever round the world. No act, no word,
But doth affect us all, for good or ill.
The fool alone believes that he can fix
The orbit of his folly. Obscurely safe
The savage planter deemed his cotton-field ;
But every lash upon his helpless slave
Has cut a welt upon all freemen's backs.
Should I abandon Honor in its need,
There is no face in all the patriot band
But would behold me with convicting scorn.

MRS. HESPER.

You had not thus determined yesterday.

HESPER.

An hour, a twinkling, makes a boy a man ;
To-day redeems my childish yesterday.

MRS. HESPER.

But, Ralph, it's still too early to decide
Where justice lies. Your uncle plainly states
That politicians have fomented strife
For partisan effect ; they've overreached,
And soon will quell this too unruly plot.
Now, surely, duty does not hale you out
To be accomplice in such men's intrigues?

HESPER.

By what election does my uncle strut
As Honor's spokesman? No, my mother, no !
One fact abides amid the whirl and scum
Of quibble or dispute, — our country's risk.

It matters not what error brought her there ;
All partisans are turned to patriots,
In emulous resolve to succor her.

MRS. HESPER.

Yet, yet, delay a little, I implore,
Until the need shows unmistakable.
Within a month the tempest may be spent —

HESPER.

I can't forego the duty of that month.
If brief the trial, more 's the call for haste,
Before the chance slips by. When, from the shore,
I see a drowning man at utmost gasp,
Shall I procrastinate until I learn
How he fell in ; or till I 've ascertained
He cannot save himself, and no one else
Will dare the noble plunge ? I wait — he drowns.
To hear the earliest call of those in need,
And be among the foremost to respond, —
That is a golden rule. I thank the fates
They leave no loop for doubt or cavil here.

MRS. HESPER.

Oh Ralph ! can nothing qualify your zeal ?
Can new ambition harden so your heart
Against the voice of life-long tenderness ?

HESPER.

Mother, can you misread me ? You accuse
Of cheap ambition, filial unconcern ?
If I spoke bluntly, 't was to root myself,

Lest Love's persuasive voice seduce my will.
In you a motherly affection pleads.
Could I resist it, but that in me grow
The seeds of duty which you planted here?
All I have said your judgment will approve,
Once past the shock of newness ; for you taught
We should not, when a crisis calls for proof,
Abjure the creed professed by us at ease.
'T were better you had pined to childless age,
Than borne a son to skulk or falter now.
Henceforth, at news of danger or success,
You will rejoice to think, *My son was there.*

MRS. HESPER.

Since you will go, my blessing go with you.
I urge no more ; but from my anxious heart
Each hour I'll pray that God most merciful
Will clear a path to lead you back to me.
But Constance — does she know? Does she consent?

HESPER.

Methinks I see her standing in the sun,
Unconscious of the gloom which darkens us.
Beautiful Constance, yet a little while
Thy nectar of felicity sip on !
I bring thee wormwood — I, who would bring joy !
Before my courage flinches, I must tell.
Thank heaven that she is brave ! I trust in that.
And you, dear mother, you will comfort her,
And pacify her dread. — I hear her step :
Leave us a little while alone.

MRS. HESPER.

I pray
That God protect and fortify you both.

[*Exit.* *Enter* CONSTANCE.]

CONSTANCE.

There is a sorrow on your countenance
I never saw before.

HESPER.

Here in my heart,
Belovèd Constance, is the cause.

CONSTANCE.

What grief
So vast and terrible that it can daunt
My love? Speak out your anguish at its flood.

HESPER.

Oh that I might ensheathe the blade of Truth
In painless words! Love, we must part to-day.

CONSTANCE.

We part? To-day? We — who are soon to wed?
Who has authority to hint this wrong?

HESPER.

Star of my soul's delight! if in ourselves
The conduct of our happiness were placed,
Unchecked, unmoved, we might live happy ever;
✓ But linked we are, by bonds we may not break,
To all our fellow-men. This very hour

One of those thoughts which rise up unawares
Out of our deepest soul, and sternly grasp
The rudder of our life and put the ship about,
Spoke this command : *Thou mayst not longer shirk :
Thy country needs thee ; hasten to her aid.*

CONSTANCE (*aside*).

O God ! the only voice he must obey !

HESPER.

You know how we let go unheeded by
Wild rumors of impending war. You know
That love so joined us, past dividing seams,
We did not tremble at the cruel knife
Which cuts our friends asunder. Would to God
The woe of leaving you summed all the woes
Which duty can inflict ! That, that were hard ;
But I should master, bidden by your lips
To show that valor is the twin of love.
But now, among the Union's enemies,
Your folk, your friends, perhaps your brothers, arm.
You cannot wish me triumph in a cause
Which must destroy your home, and ruin them ;
Nor can you bid me stay. Oh serpent Fate,
To crush, not kill us, with tyrannic coils !
[*A short pause.*
I've told all, Constance ; are you silent ?

CONSTANCE.

Yes —

In admiration. That you truly loved,
These many happy months, I could not doubt ;

Now I am sure you're worthy all my love.
This blessèd certitude uplifts my soul
A little moment to that purest heaven
Where Love abides eternal, — far beyond
The crosses and the griefs which maim him here.

HESPER.

Oh Constance, could I — can I part from you?
I thought, at first, I might evade the call;
That, wedded, we might hide ourselves away,
Oblivious, in some sequestered spot,
Known but to Love and us. But even there
The murmurs of my duty unperformed
Would persecute my rest; the winds themselves
Would growl the echoes of the cannonade,
To taunt me, basely safe; and I should see
Pitying scorn condemn me in your eyes.
For all the world I would not hazard that.

CONSTANCE.

We know the sentence; and we must submit.
At this bleak time we'll sow our hopes and wishes
Against a happier season. But to part, —
To feel the infinite load of anxious days,
When every hour seems swollen to the stretch
Of endless time; to waver on the brink
Of dread's abyss, until we almost crave
The jump that hurls us to the worst we fear,
And thereby kills suspense!

HESPER.

Constance, my soul!

You have my plighted word to serve but you :
I cannot go, if you command me stay.
You rule my love, my life, my honor, — speak!

CONSTANCE.

I bid you, *Go!* I need not bid, *Be brave!*
Your resolution tells me I too owe
My service to my kindred in distress.
What woman can to cheer and strengthen them,
That will I do. My heart can't weigh the cause, —
The God of Justice must determine that.
And when the fury and the havoc cease —
Pray heaven it be soon! — and peace returns
To heal the wounds of war and knit more firm
The ties which discord shattered, — Hesper, then,
When duty may no more divide or part,
If you still seek a wife to love but you
Through this life and all others, come to me.
[*Military music, as of a passing regiment, heard in the
street below. HESPER leads CONSTANCE to the win-
dow, and in silence they look out.*

HESPER (*as the sound retreats*).

How quick they marched! I start with them to-night.

SCENE III. — *Virginia. The Seat of War. Drawing-room of a Mansion.* HESPER, in colonel's uniform, writing a despatch by lamplight. BLAKE, a Lieutenant, stands near him.

HESPER.

It's now nine o'clock, Blake. This despatch must be at headquarters by midnight. You will make sure the General himself receives it immediately. Yes, you must hand it to him yourself. Impress upon him the importance of carrying that position. The attack must be made before Thursday, when the Confederates will be re-enforced, and three brigades could n't dislodge them. To-morrow, our regiment alone can capture it. Persuade the General to let us do the work to-morrow. Here's your packet. Go. You have three hours for fifteen miles. Follow the high-road for about seven, till it bends westward, there — (*pointing on a map*); then you must strike towards the east, through rough lanes. Don't lose your way. Remember, not later than midnight. If possible, bring me the General's consent by breakfast.

LIEUTENANT.

I'll not fail, Colonel, though I ditch my horse.

HESPER (*accompanying him to the door*).

May speed attend you, and success reward,
This ride shall gild your epaulets. Good-night.

[*Exit Lieutenant.*]

There goes a friend in whom I trust
As in my own right hand! Were all as true,

A single will might multiply effects,
O'erleaping distance, at a thousand points.
[*He returns to his chair at the table; removes his side-arms.*

Night and the memory of to-day's hot deeds
Clew up my active spirit. Well, if thus
Upon the stubborn, sanguinary field
I always earned the recompense of sleep!
When cannon roar and showering bullets hiss, —
After the heart's first flutter takes the beat
Of reckless exultation, — when the smoke
Puffs out the bosom with inspiring fumes,
How glorious to be a soldier then!
Who would not dare amid the rush and clang,
Which stimulate no purpose but to dare?
And as the danger shoots up tall and dire,
How courage mounts to match its highest threat,
And grieves it is so small! In action men
Look destiny's worst terror in the eyes,
And prove themselves above it — though they die.
Better the sharp collision and the charge,
Than dilatory camp and tortoise march,
Which rust the will and too much lengthen war.
Come soon, oh Peace, with Victory to crown
The righteous cause, and make old foes new friends. —
Belovèd Constance, where art thou to-night?
In every battle, bivouac, and toil,
Thou art my stanch companion and support:
Desire for thee intensates all my thoughts.
[*A pause. HESPER seems to doze. A secret door is cautiously opened at the further end of the room. HESPER rouses, and seizes his revolver.*

What noise was that? Oh, there are traitors here!
Come forth, or I'll despatch a ball to fetch you.

[*The door opens again; CONSTANCE issues from it.*
What! Constance, you?

CONSTANCE.

Yes, Hesper, I.

I never thought that in my father's house
He who should be my husband would assert
A conqueror's command. I dreamed that here
Our bridal days would glide from joy to joy.
Now, in my ruined home we meet, unwed.

HESPER.

Constance, throughout the cannonade to-day
Before our troops had captured this position,
Surely, you were not here, within the shot
Of peril?

CONSTANCE.

Yes; why not? Brave men were here
And needed woman's care. In the South Hall
I nursed the wounded soldiers, till a shell
Set half the house ablaze. Our lines fell back
Slowly, and with them bore the wounded off.
I stayed, to seek some precious keepsakes; then,
Escape cut off, I hid myself in there.

HESPER.

Heroic Constance! Let us, Love, forget
The brutal mien of War, for this brief night,—
The last, perhaps, which Chance may offer us.
Upon this jut of Time we'll rest till morn;

Locked in the dear embraces, deified
By the nepenthe of our mutual love.
Till the in-tide of moments drowns our rock,
This night shall be our love's eternity. —
Oh magic lips, you kiss the Past away !
How fared you, sweetheart, through the tedious doom
Of absence? Speak, and bridge the void with news.
Concerning you, the noisy months were dumb ;
And though I questioned prisoners and spies
'T was e'er to be rebuffed, save only once :
A friend of mine, — a fellow-officer, —
Brought low with wounds, was captured by your troops ;
Long weeks he balanced in a desperate fever ;
But at each pause in his delirium's surge,
He said a woman stood beside his cot,
And Hope beamed on him out of purple eyes ;
At last he mended, was in time exchanged,
And though he could not tell the name of her
Who wooed him back to life, I knew 't was you.

CONSTANCE.

That, Hesper, is the story of my days.
The hospital has been my battle-field ;
My battle has been waged with Death himself ;
My victory has been to wrest from him
The victims whom he clutched. But I have had
Frequent reports of you, for valor shines
Beyond the friendly camp. How like a flame
You leaped from grade to grade, and made each brighter,
I duly heard, and wondered from afar.
Though I rejoiced, I trembled that you sought
Fame and advancement where death's oftenest met.

HESPER.

Constance, my fame is but a tiny spark
Amid the general blaze : destructive Time
Will quench the lustre of the greatest soon ;
Our mighty battles shrivel into dates
Set for a schoolboy's task ; our brave exploits
But shed a glamour on a girl's romance.
Enough for each to quit him nobly now,
That those unborn may never justly say,
“ We had been happier had our sires been true.”
Why talk of war, whose every thorny word
Goads up the recollection of the strife
Which separated us ? Let love balm heartache
And put to sleep unlovely apprehension.
Thank heaven that you are safe, that I still feel
A loyal pressure when I touch your hand !
Your friends, your brothers — has the war spared them ?
Were you alone ?

CONSTANCE.

Charles serves on Jackson's staff ;

Edward —

HESPER.

Why hesitate ? Has he been killed ?

CONSTANCE.

How can I fill my duty to you both ?
If I disclose, I jeopard my dear brother ;
If I conceal, my lover I betray ;
Oh, why should Hesper be my brother's foe !

I'll speak, and trust your honor to decide.
In to-day's combat, he was here with me.
When we despaired of keeping you at bay,
Our wounded having been removed, I stayed
To save some precious, small mementos, dear
Because they were my mother's. He stayed too.
Brief though my search, it stretched beyond our safety :
Your soldiers barred retreat, and left but time
To hide in yonder secret cabinet
Ere they came pressing in. We waited there,
And hoped that night would aid us to escape.

HESPER.

Constance, go, ask your brother to come out.
[CONSTANCE goes to the secret door, opens it, and EDWARD ROMAINE emerges.]
Though meeting thus is hardship to us both,
I'm glad to take your hand. How oft did Constance
Tell me fond stories of her brother Ned,
Until your very name suggested love !
The chance of war makes you my prisoner, —
Nay, keep your sword, — but though my duty here
Must judge, affection shall advise him.

CONSTANCE.

Ah,

But for my rash, unwary confidence,
'Twixt now and morn you might have well been free
[to EDWARD].
And blame could not have implicated you [to HESPER].

EDWARD.

Grieve not, my sister. 'T is the soldier's risk
To suffer while confinement gnaws away
Sinews that battle toughens.

[*At an open window DARNEL's face is seen for a moment.*

DARNEL.

A trap! A family conniving!

HESPER.

Hist!

I heard a voice outside.

[*Goes to the window.*

There's no one here:

But yonder I discern a sentinel,
Along the farther margin of the lawn
Pacing his beat. Perhaps the fitful breeze
Wafted a murmur of the tune he hums. [*Returns.*]

I promise, Edward, your captivity
Shall be as mild as any. Every ease,
By which the yoke may gall your spirit less,
I will bespeak for you.

Belovèd Constance, now may you forsake
This lair of danger and fatigue. Return
To cheer my mother; she will welcome you,
And in her shelter you and she shall wait
Till Peace unite us. Here your duty's done.

Oh, for my sake, my heroine! submit
To honorable and deserved repose.
Bind not beneath a soldier's daily load

The nettle of suspense. Consent to rest ;
Enough that men should brave atrocious war.

CONSTANCE.

Consider not for me : my risk is slight,
And danger, grown familiar, loses soon
His power to appall. Not for myself,
But for my brother, whom his pride constrains
To silence, do I plead. Is there no course,
Which you may take with honor to us all,
Save this which leads to prison? Must he pine
In wasted bondage? be the mark preferred
Of small indignities, the butt of scorn?
Perhaps the prey of sickness and of ills
Which, though you would, you could not fend from him?
I plead to you, as any sister might
To a victorious foe. As such reply.

HESPER.

Feign any voice, 't is always Constance speaks.
Love shall decree, and duty ratify.
I may release your brother on parole.

CONSTANCE.

He shall accept, and I must go with him.

HESPER.

Can nothing move you, Constance? Teach my wish
Not to entreat in vain.

CONSTANCE.

Ralph, we are both
Pledged to our kindred while their need's a-wing;
Nor you, nor I, could in mid-flight desert them.
But, for your sake, hereafter I will shun
The neighborhood of harm. I bless you for
This generous reprieve.

HESPER.

Would I might bless! —
You understand you are in honor bound
To bear no arms, or otherwise abet
Your friends' endeavors, whilst the war shall last?

EDWARD.

The terms are hard, and clash with my desire;
But Constance urges, and I must submit.

HESPER.

If in your hiding-place you chanced to hear
Aught of the message my lieutenant took,
That, too, must be kept sacred.

EDWARD.

Be it so:
But liberty, thus crippled and abridged,
Lacks naught of servitude, except its name.

CONSTANCE.

Do not despond; I promise you shall know
New ways and high, that test a soldier's zeal.

HESPER.

Belovèd, since you cannot be besought
To turn away from troubles, now 't is best
You linger not. I will conduct you both
Across our lines, that so, before the morn,
When greedy havoc will dart out his fangs
To slay fresh victims, you may both be safe.
Alas ! that in a world where myriads crave
In vain one friend, complete and absolute,
Parting should sever us, whose souls are one !
That unison should save from such a doom.
Guard thy dear self, that when we next shall meet,
No scar of hardship give me cause to grieve.
When we shall meet — ah, when ?

CONSTANCE.

If it be soon,
Or long-delayed, you shall not find me changed.
Come with the swiftest harbinger of peace —
Be mine forever, and forever more.

HESPER (*on the threshold*).

How still and sweet the night ! How bright the stars !
The rumble and the smoke of mortal strife
Reach not a league in air ; they cannot blur
Those countless eyes of joyousness and peace.
Has Love no heaven where devoted hearts
May shine forever in unclouded bliss ?

[*Exeunt.*]

DARNEL (*appearing again at the window*).

Here's treason ready-forged. Mine be the blame,
If thus equipped I fail in my revenge.

SCENE IV. — *A Camp. Distant firing heard. Two Officers.*

FIRST OFFICER.

Boom! boom! They're hot at it, but that tune is too loud to last long. Let them bellow their worst, — our fellows have thick drums to their ears, and the din won't stop them. It's a terrible road, though, that Hesper is leading his men through.

SECOND OFFICER.

I wish we were on it. Beyond that little mile of hell there's sure promotion.

FIRST OFFICER.

Perhaps to heaven.

SECOND OFFICER.

I tingle with envy when I think our regiment might be there at this moment, instead of loafing here, like miners out of work. The General won't have Hesper's glory lessened by letting us halve it.

FIRST OFFICER.

Those Rebs are plucky, but they may whistle for help. Lee could n't save them, were he five miles off instead of thirty. There's a salute from our rifles. At 'em, boys! You'll soon gag their battery.

SECOND OFFICER.

Here come two riders at top speed.

FIRST OFFICER.

That one in front is Wells, of the staff. Perhaps the General has relented, and we may smell powder to-day.

SECOND OFFICER.

Too late! Hesper has his grip on the prize already. The other's a civilian.

FIRST OFFICER.

Oh, I know him. That's Darnel, — one of your political warriors, gentlemanly buzzards who gorge themselves on camp spoils. He's the contractor that supplies us maggots in bacon, like plums in a pudding, and allows us boots soled with the best brown card-board.

[Enter an AIDE-DE-CAMP and DARNEL.]

AIDE.

Good-morning. I have an important despatch for Colonel Hesper.

FIRST OFFICER.

And none for our colonel?

AIDE.

No; for Colonel Hesper.

FIRST OFFICER.

You 'll not find him here ; and when you do find him, he will not be a colonel.

AIDE.

Where is he? My orders are urgent.

SECOND OFFICER.

He 's up there, looking for a brigadier's brevet, in the smoke.

DARNEL (*aside*).

I must wait a little to see his disgrace. But revenge will be sweeter if it strike him in success.

FIRST OFFICER.

There 's nothing for it but to ride after him. You can't miss the road ; just follow the cannon-music and you 'll soon overtake him, unless a bullet overtakes you.

AIDE.

My orders are to have him report immediately at headquarters. There 's a serious charge —

FIRST OFFICER.

A serious charge ! A Balaklava you might call it !

DARNEL.

You joke.

FIRST OFFICER.

Yes, and no. I 'm a Yankee.

DARNEL.

I heard unpleasant rumors at headquarters that Hesper is mixed up in a treasonable affair.

FIRST OFFICER.

Treason! What jealous, scurvy rogue hatched that lie? Hurry up yonder, and I warrant you'll see a new sort of treason.

DARNEL.

It's too bad so good a soldier should be tainted with this suspicion. Nevertheless, the General hinted to me that the evidence looks pretty black against him. Hesper and I are old friends, and I came to encourage him until he clears himself.

SECOND OFFICER.

They have silenced the cannon. See! see! they have planted our flag on the breastworks! Take my glass.

FIRST OFFICER.

It's true! The position's won! Make haste, gentlemen, if you would be the first to congratulate General Hesper.

SECOND OFFICER.

Yes; don't delay. The road is safe enough now. Any Congressman might venture it.

AIDE.

I must go. Will you come?

DARNEL.

Most certainly. [*Aside.*] The higher his rise, the harder will be his fall.

[*They ride away.*]

FIRST OFFICER.

I smell a coward's trick here.

SCENE V. — *The captured Redoubt.* HESPER, *unconscious, supported by his Lieutenant, and attended by a Surgeon.*

LIEUTENANT.

Alas! good doctor, he has died too soon.
The ball that took his life took from him too
The news of victory.

SURGEON.

He is not dead.

A little life still flutters in his pulse,
And hope now sets a signal in his cheeks.
It was a murderous wound. Not one in ten
Could rise from such a shock. We must rely
On his uncommon vigor; and his will,
If once he wakes, will battle on our side.

LIEUTENANT.

See! his eyes open!

HESPER (*faintly*).

One last charge, my men!

SURGEON.

His mind is wandering. He swoons again.
It's pitiful how very weak he is.

LIEUTENANT.

Doctor, I beg you save my truest friend.

SURGEON.

Ah, Blake, a desperate request is yours.
Lift his head up a little : so. 'T will ease
His breathing.

LIEUTENANT.

Oh, what phantoms are we men !
An hour ago this friend here in my arms
Was full of generous life. Strength, courage, hope,
And every quality of head and heart
That most adorns a man, and most endears,
Had its abode in him. Now, like a clod,
He sinks to nothingness — strength, valor sped :
And all my friendship, all your utmost skill,
Of no avail to stop the little breach
Through which death creepeth in ! When thus we see
Our body's but a tenement of clay,
Where the soul lodges, — an abode of worms,
Unless the soul be lord and tenant there, —
Can we believe this vivifying all,
Which loves, which dares, which hopes, which thinks
a God,
Dies with its dusty mansion ?

SURGEON.

Hush! He stirs.

HESPER.

All silent? Were our men repulsed? Ah, Blake,
You here? Are you not needed in the charge?

LIEUTENANT.

The victory is yours.

HESPER.

Then I'm content.

SURGEON.

Drink, Colonel. Every drop will give you strength.
Forbear to talk. You mend already, sir.
See, Blake, how regular his pulse beats now.

HESPER.

Ah, friends, your wish deceives you. In my breast
I feel the gap through which life ebbs away.
But, Blake, you're wounded. Doctor, look to him.

LIEUTENANT.

Only a scratch — a bullet kissed my cheek.

HESPER.

Was our loss heavy?

LIEUTENANT.

Near a hundred killed ;
The wounded double that.

HESPER.

A fearful price,
As mothers reckon ; but the gain atones.
Go, surgeon, minister to those whom yet
You may relieve. I am beyond your help.

SURGEON.

Not so.

LIEUTENANT.

Each moment, Hesper, betters hope.

HESPER.

I thank you both, but death has entered here.
Blake, my dear comrade in these heats of war
Which purge the base and purify the true,
Farewell. May happy fortune be your friend,
Ever your steadfast friend. One service more
Your love shall render. Let my mother know
That even here the thought of her upheld me ;
And—can you hear me, Blake? My voice grows faint—
This ring give Constance, when you soonest may,
And say that Hesper, at farewell with Time,
Felt love more strong than death. You promise, Blake?

LIEUTENANT.

Trust me in all.

HESPER.

We conquered — are you sure?
Is that you, Constance, kissed away my pain?
I cannot see, but, Love, I know your lips.
Good-night, good-night, Belovèd! I must sleep.

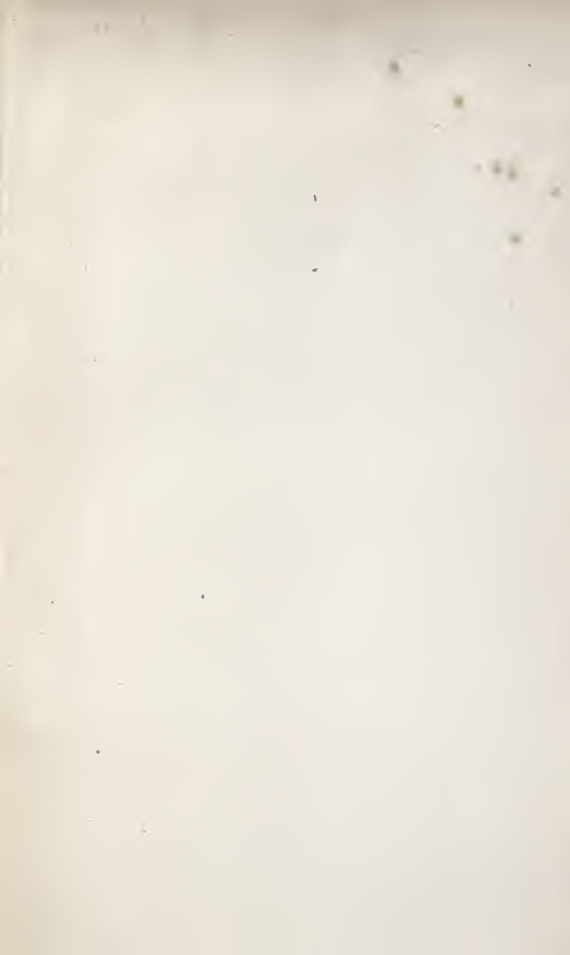
LIEUTENANT.

The man I loved and honored most is dead.

THE END.







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